

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TAIPEI 6452

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SUBJECT: VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF TAIWAN:

MAINTENANCE OF THE STATUS QUO, REUNIFICATION WITH THE MAINLAND,
OR AN INDEPENDENT TAIWAN?

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE ATTEMPTS TO
CATEGORIZE THE POPULATION OF TAIWAN ON THE BASIS OF LONG
AND SHORT-TERM ASPIRATIONS OF MAINLANDERS AND TAIWANESE
WITH RESPECT TO THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF TAIWAN.
ANY STUDY OF THIS NATURE IS OBVIOUSLY BOTH
SPECULATIVE AND SUBJECTIVE. MOREOVER, ALTHOUGH
UNCERTAINTIES REGARDING TAIWAN'S FUTURE ARE AT THE BACK
OF MANY PEOPLE'S MINDS HERE, THERE IS A RELUCTANCE ON THE PART OF MOST
--EXCEPT THE "OLD GUARD" -- TO
EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS (ASIDE FROM VAGUE, LONG-TERM
ASPIRATIONS) ON TAIWAN'S POLITICAL FUTURE.
NONETHELESS, BASED ON
THE LIMITED VIEWS AVAILABLE AND ON OBSERVATIONS OF
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ACTUAL APPROACHES TO DAILY PROBLEMS, AN ANALYSIS CAN

BE MADE OF WHAT VIEWS APPEAR TO BE MOST PREVALENT.

2. BASED ON THIS ANALYSIS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ALTHOUGH LONG-TERM ASPIRATIONS OF MAINLANDERS AND TAIWANESE VARY, SHORTER TERM GOALS OF THOSE WHO HAVE INFLUENCE IN THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS TEND TO COINCIDE ON THE NEED FOR AT LEAST TEMPORARILY MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, OTHER GROUPS HAVE WIDELY VARYING VIEWS ON THE QUESTION OF TAIWAN'S POLITICAL FUTURE--RANGING FROM RECOVERY OF THE MAINLAND (AMONG THE OLD GUARD) TO AN ACCELERATION OF "TAIWANIZATION" OF THE GOVERNMENT, POSSIBLY LEADING TO AT LEAST DE FACTO POLITICAL SEPARATION FROM THE MAINLAND (AMONG TAIWANESE). THESE OTHER GROUPS PLAY LITTLE, IF ANY, ROLE IN THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS; HOWEVER, THE PREMIER SEEKS THE SUPPORT OF SOME AND DESIRES AT LEAST THE ACQUIESCENCE OF OTHERS.

END SUMMARY.

3. TAIWANESE VIEWS-THE LONG RUN: A TAIWAN RULED PRIMARILY BY TAIWANESE (WITH DE FACTO OR DE JURE SEPARATION FROM THE MAINLAND) IS THE UNDERLYING ASPIRATION OF VIRTUALLY ALL TAIWANESE. WHILE THE ONCE DEEP RESENTMENT AGAINST RULE BY MAINLANDERS HAS DISSIPATED SOMEWHAT IN RECENT YEARS, MAINLANDER CONTROL AT THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL IS ACQUIESCED IN AS THE BEST PRESENT OPTION RATHER THAN ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THE AVERAGE TAIWANESE--BE HE FARMER, LABORER, BUSINESSMAN, OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

4. AS FOR FUTURE REUNIFICATION WITH THE MAINLAND, ON A PURELY THEORETICAL LEVEL MOST TAIWANESE WILL ACKNOWLEDGE THEY BELONG TO THE GREAT CHINESE RACE, WHICH HISTORICALLY WAS AND IDEALLY SHOULD BE UNITED. HOWEVER, FOR MOST THIS "IDEAL" APPEARS TO BE OUTWEIGHTED BY (A) AN UNWILLINGNESS TO RISK JEOPARDIZING THEIR PRESENT STANDARD OF LIVING AS A RESULT OF REUNIFICATION WITH THE LESS-DEVELOPED MAINLAND, (B) A RELUCTANCE TO SUBMIT THEMSELVES TO RULE IN PERPETUITY BY NON-TAIWANESE AND (C) A DISLIKE OF COMMUNISM (OR

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AT LEAST OF THE UNKNOWN) ENGENDERED BY MORE THAN 25 YEARS OF KMT PROPAGANDA.

5. TAIWANESE VIEWS-THE SHORTER RUN: ASIDE FROM THE UNDERLYING SENTIMENTS MENTIONED ABOVE, THE VAST BULK (PERHAPS 90 PERCENT OR MORE) OF THE TAIWANESE POPULATION, MUCH OF WHICH IS RURAL, IS RELATIVELY UNPOLITICIZED. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THEY ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT MAINTENANCE OF THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO SO LONG

AS THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING CONTINUES TO RISE (OR AT LEAST DOES NOT DRAMATICALLY DECLINE) AND SO LONG AS GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES DO NOT, IN THEIR VIEW, UNDULY IMPINGE ON THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES.

6. POLITICIZED TAIWANESE CAN BE ROUGHLY DIVIDED INTO FOUR GROUPS:

A. THOSE WHO, PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS THEY DERIVE UNDER A STABLE GOVERNMENT, ARE WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH AND AVOID PUBLICLY CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT, EVEN THOUGH THE PRIVATE POLITICAL VIEWS SOME MAY HOLD DO NOT COINCIDE WITH GROC POLICY. THIS GROUP PRIMARILY CMPRISES BUSINESSMEN (WHO SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO EVEN IF THEY WOULD WISH TO SEE CHANGES, BECAUSE THEY FEAR THAT ANY CHANGE COULD JEOPARDIZE THEIR PERSONAL FUTURE), BUT ALSO INCLUDES SOME TAIWANESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND BUREAUCRATS (WHO SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO FOR PERSONAL REASONS RATHER THAN OUT OF POLITICAL CONVICTION). THEY HAVE LITTLE, IF ANY, INFLUENCE IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND, SO LONG AS THEY

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MAINTAIN THEIR COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE GOVERNMENT, ARE NOT A FORCE WITH WHICH THE GOVERNMENT MUST CONTEND. HOWEVER, IF BECAUSE OF DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE PRESENT SITUATION (E.G., A SERIOUS ECONOMIC DECLINE OR AN UNSTABLE SITUATION CONSEQUENT ON US RECOGNITION OF THE PRC AND DERECOGNITION OF THE ROC) BUSINESSMEN FEEL THEIR POSITION IS THREATENED, THEY COULD POSE PROBLEMS FOR THE GOVERNMENT WHICH RELIES UPON THEIR AT LEAST PASSIVE COOPERATION AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STABILITY.

B. THOSE WHO ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT (AS DISTINGUISHED FROM GROUP A. WHOSE SUPPORT IS FOR THE MOSTPART PASSIVE) BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT PREMIER CHIANG CHING-KUO (CCK) IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION (I.E., BRINGING MORE TAIWANESE INTO THE GOVERNMENT) AND IS THUS WORTHY OF SUPPORT. THIS GROUP INCLUDES SOME TAIWANESE BUSINESSMEN, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AND BUREAUCRATS, WHO SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO WHILE HOPING FOR A CONTINUATION OF THE PREMIER'S POLICY OF "TAIWANIZATION" OF THE GOVERNMENT. WHILE MEMBERS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS GROUP HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE IN THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, SOME (SUCH AS KO WEN-FU, MAGISTRATE OF PINGTUNG, AND KAO YU-JEN, MAGISTRATE OF TAINAN) DO HAVE AT LEAST LIMITED INFLUENCE AND MAY HAVE MORE IN THE FUTURE. IF THERE WERE DRASTIC CHANGES IN THE PRESENT SITUATION, THIS GROUP MIGHT ALSO BEGIN TO QUESTION ITS SUPPORT OF THE GOV. SINCE IT REPRESENTS MUCH OF THE ESTABLISHED MIDDLE CLASS INCLUDING ESTABLISHED AND RISING TAIWANESE POLITICIANS, LOSS OF ITS SUPPORT WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT SETBACK FOR CCK.

C. THOSE WHO ARE CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT AND VIEW IT AS MOVING TOO SLOWLY WITH "TAIWANIZATION" BUT BELIEVE THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE (AND ONLY NON-VIOLENT) WAY TO ALTER TAIWAN'S POLITICAL FORM IS THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS. (THE DEFINITION OF WHAT IS CONSTITUTIONAL, OF COURSE, IS SUBJECT TO INTERPRETATION). THIS GROUP CONSISTS MAINLY OF THOSE POLITICIANS (USUALLY NON-KMT), INTELLECTUALS, AND YOUNGER BUSINESSMEN WHO DO NOT FALL INTO CATEGORY B ABOVE. (NOTE THE COMPOSITION OF THESE TWO GROUPS IS SOMEWHAT BLURRED, BUT THERE ARE CLEARLY TWO VIEWS DESCRIBED HERE. ONE ACTIVELY SUPPORTS AND THE OTHER CRITICIZES BUT ACQUIESCES IN GOVERNMENT ACTIONS.) IT PLAYS NO ROLE IN THE POLITICAL-DECISION MAKING PROCESS BUT IS A POSSIBLE FORCE TO CONTEND WITH SINCE IT INCLUDES SOME OF TAIWAN'S MORE POPULAR POLITICAL FIGURES (SUCH AS LEGISLATIVE YUAN MEMBER KANG NING-HSIANG). ASIDE

FROM ADVOCATING A FASTER PACE OF "TAIWANIZATION", THIS GROUP WOULD ALSO PREFER MOVING TOWARDS A MORE INDEPENDENT STATUS FOR TAIWAN, EITHER DE FACTO OR DE JURE, BUT REALIZES THAT THIS IS UNLIKELY TO OCCUR UNDER PRESENT LEADERSHIP. WHILE IT PRESENTLY HAS MINIMAL ORGANIZATION, THIS GROUP COULD BECOME MORE ACTIVE IN THE FUTURE IF DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE PRESENT SITUATION (E.G., A SEVERE ECONOMIC DECLINE OR US RECOGNITION OF THE PRC) OCCUR, ESPECIALLY IF IT CAN SOLICIT THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THOSE IN PARA 6.A. OR B. ABOVE.

D. THOSE WHO PRIVATELY ADVOCATE MORE RADICAL ACTION,
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RANGING FROM A UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE TO REUNIFICATION WITH THE MAINLAND. THIS VERY SMALL ELEMENT OF YOUNGER INTELLECTUALS HAS NO INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND IS UNLIKELY UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS TO BE A FORCE TO CONTEND WITH SINCE ITS VARIOUS FACTIONS HAVE LITTLE, IF ANY, ORGANIZATION AND VIRTUALLY NO SUPPORT FROM THE POPULACE.

7. MAINLANDER VIEWS-THE LONG RUN: REUNIFICATION OF SOME SORT WITH THE MAINLAND IS THE UNDERLYING ASPIRATION OF NEARLY ALL MAINLANDERS ON TAIWAN, ALTHOUGH MOST OF THEM REALIZE THAT THIS IS UNLIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES THEY WOULD ACCEPT REUNIFICATION VARIES: FOR SOME, REUNIFICATION WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE UNLESS UNDER KMT LEADERSHIP; FOR MANY, REUNIFICATION UNDER NON-COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE; FOR A VERY FEW, REUNIFICATION EVEN UNDER COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE. IN GENERAL, REUNIFICATION HAS BECOME FOR MOST A MYSTICAL GOAL OF THE FUTURE--TO BE OBTAINED MAINLY BECAUSE "WE ARE CHINESE".

8. MAINLANDER VIEWS-THE SHORTER RUN: MOST MAINLANDERS ARE WILLING FOR THE NONCE TO SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, THEIR SHORT TERM ASPIRATIONS DO VARY AND THEY CAN ROUGHLY BE DIVIDED ON THAT BASIS AS FOLLOWS:

A. THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE COUNTRY SHOULD ACTIVELY CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TOWARDS REGAINING THE MAINLAND. THIS GROUP, THE "OLD GUARD", CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF SOME SENIOR ELEMENTS OF THE MILITARY, THE KMT, AND THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY. THEY VIEW THE STATUS QUO AS AN INTERMIM PERIOD UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THEY CAN RETURN TO THE MAINLAND. THEY THEREFORE OPPOSE EFFORTS TOWARDS "TAIWANIZATION" AND WOULD OBVIOUSLY ALSO STRONGLY

OPPOSE ANY MOVE TOWARDS ESTABLISHING DE FACTO OR DE JURE
SEPARATION FROM THE MAINLAND. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY
WOULD CONSIDER NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST
LEADERSHIP OF THE PRC AS AN ANATHEMA. WHILE THEY HAVE
LIMITED INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

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PROCESS, THEY ARE ANELEMENT WHOSE OPPOSITION THE
PREMIER WOULD PREFER TO AVOID. THEY ONLY INFLUENCE
THEY CAN EXERCISE IS NEGATIVE--AND EVEN THIS HAS
BEEN ERODED BY THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT CHIANG AND THE
ABSENCE OF MADAME CHIANG.

B. THOSE WHO RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR FUTURE FOR TH
FORESEEABLE FUTUE IS ON TAIWAN AND WHO ACTIVELY
SUPPORT HHE STATUS QUO. THIS GROUP COMPRISES MOST
IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INCLUDING THE PREMIER
AND HAS WITHIN IT VIRTUALLY TOTAL POLITICAL DECISION-
MAKING POWER. WHILE IT SUPPORTS GRADUAL "TAIWANIZATION"
AS A WAY OF CONSOLIDATING SUPPORT, IT WOULD NOT BE
LIEKLY TO INITIATE MOVES TOWARDS A FORMALLY SEPARATE STATUS FOR
TAIWAN UNLESS IT APPEARED TAIWAN

HAD NO OTHER VIABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR THE FUTURE.
IT WOULD BE EQUALLY UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP OF THE PRC, WHICH IS
REGARDED AS THE NUMBER ONE NATIONAL ENEMY.
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C. DISCONTENTED ELEMENTS WHO, WHILE THEY BELIEVE THEY
HAVE NO FUTURE HERE, ACQUIESCE IN THE CONTINUATION OF THE
STATUS QUO. THIS GROUP COMPRISES MANY YOUNG AND
OLD MAINLANDERS OUT OF GOVERNMENT WHO BELIEVE THAT THE
KMT IS NOT DOING ENOUGH FOR THEM. INCREASINGLY, IT
ALSO INCLUDES MANY MIDDLE LEVEL BUREAUCRATS AND
MILITARY OFFICERS WHO FIND "TAIWANIZATION" LIMITING
THEIR HOPES ON TAIWAN AND SEE LITTLE PROSPECT FOR
RETURN TO THE MAINLAND. NATURALLY ENOUGH THEY OPPOSE
"TAIWANIZATION" OF THE GOVERNMENT, PERCEIVING IT AS
PREJUDICIAL TO THEIR PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS, AND WOULD
ALSO OPPOSE MOVES TOWARDS A SEPARATE STATUS FOR TAIWAN.
THEY ARE NOT INFLUENTIAL IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING
AND ARE UNLIKELY TO BE A FORCE TO CONTEND WITH.

D. SOME INTELLECTUALS (INCLUDING AN INCREASING NUMBER
OF RETURNED STUDENTS) WHO WHILE RECOGNIZING THEIR
FUTURE HERE, FOR THE MOMENT, CRITICIZE THE KMT, WHICH
THEY CHARACTERIZE AS AUTOCRATIC AND CORRUPT, AND
BELIEVE THAT THE TAIWANESE DESERVE AND NEED MORE VOICE
IN THE GOVERNMENT IF TAIWAN IS TO CONTINUE VIABLE.
THEY WOULD, HOWEVER, BALK AT SUGGESTIONS OF COMPLETE
SEPARATION FROM THE MAINLAND. THIS IS A VERY SMALL
GROUP AND HAS NO PRESENT INFLUENCE.

9. APART FROM THE ABOVE, ALL OF WHOM ACCEPT FOR THE MOMENT THE
STATUS QUO, THERE IS AN EXTREMELY SMALL
GROUP OF MAINLANDERS WHO ARE SO OPPOSED TO THE KMT
GOVERNMENT THAT THEY WOULD ADVOCATE IMMEDIATE REUNI-
FICATION WITH THE MAINLAND, EITHER DIRECTLY UNDER
COMMUNIST RULE OR THROUGH SOME "AUTONOMOUS ARRANGEMENT".
THIS GROUP, COMPRISED OF A FEW YOUNG INTELLECTUALS,
APPARENTLY HAS NO FORMAL ORGANIZATION AND VIRTUALLY NO
INFLUENCE, REAL OR POTENTIAL.

10. CONCLUSION: DESPITE DIFFERING LONG-RANGE
ASPIRATIONS, THOSE MAINLANDERS AND TAIWANESE IN
POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS ARE UNIFIED IN
THEIR SUPPORT AT THE PRESENT FOR MAINTENANCE OF THE
STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF HIS DESIRE FOR BROAD-
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BASED SUPPORT AMONG VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION, THE PREMIER MUST ENGAGE IN A DELICATE ACT OF BALANCING DESIRES OF MAINLANDERS--MANY OF WHOM OPPOSE OR PREFER A SLOW PACE OF "TAIWANIZATION"--AND TAIWANESE --MANY OF WHOM WOULD PREFER AN ACCELERATION IN THE PACE OF "TAIWANIZATION". THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THESE GROUPS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY IMPEL THE PREMIER, SHOULD HE EVER BE TEMPTED TO MOVE TOARDS A MORE FORMALIZED SEPARATE STATUS FOR TAIWAN OR TOWARDS NEGOTIATIONS WITH PEKING, TO STICK TO THE STATUS QUO, AS LONG AS IT CONTINUES TO HAVE THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OR ACQUIESCENCE OF ALL POTENTIALLY INFLUENTIAL CLEMENTS IN THE POPULATION. UNGER

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